DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 437 FL 016 736

AUTHOR Valdes, Gabriel M.
TITLE The Teaching of Culture in the ESL and Foreign Language Classes.
PUB DATE Jun 86
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University of South Florida Linguistics Club Conference on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching (6th, Tampa, FL, June 27-28, 1986).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Competency Based Education; *Course Content; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; *Curriculum Development; *English (Second Language); Independent Study; Inservice Teacher Education; Reading Materials; Second Language Instruction; Statewide Planning; Teacher Role; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Florida

ABSTRACT

The interaction of language and culture was examined and found to support the idea that the study of the culture of the people who speak the target language is a very important part of English as a second language (ESL) and foreign language classes. Recent curriculum frameworks developed by the Florida Department of Education were used to illustrate a suggested sequence for the teaching of culture and to show the difference between that instruction in ESL and foreign language classes. Some general recommendations for the teaching of culture are made and the teacher competencies needed to follow the recommendations are outlined. Finally, suggestions and recommendations are made for acquiring these competencies, with special emphasis on the professional readings that can assist teachers in their own inservice education. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED282437

THE TEACHING OF CULTURE IN THE ESL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Gabriel Valdes
Foreign Language Program Specialist
Florida Department of Education

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University of South Florida Linguistics Club Conference on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching (6th, Tampa, FL, June 27-28, 1986)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Valdes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL016736

Gabriel M. Valdes
Foreign Language Program Specialist
Florida Department of Education

THE TEACHING OF CULTURE IN THE ESL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Under the assumption that the teaching of culture is an integral part of second language instruction, this paper will deal with the teaching of culture in both the English as a Second Language (ESL) and the foreign language classes. It will explore the interrelationship between language and culture to arrive at a definition of the kind of culture that should be taught. Recommendations on how to teach culture will be given. The competencies necessary for this teaching, including how to acquire them, will be delineated.

Interaction Between Language and Culture

Anthropologists (Benedict, 2) have defined culture as the way of life of a people, the sum of their learned behavioral patterns and their material things. Laird (8) stated that the origin of language is unknown, but that behavioral patterns and cultural patterns preceded language. Language is an agreement among human beings to communicate their thoughts, and for language to be understood it has to be placed in a cultural context. Language always reflects human nature, and it is created and changed by human beings and their cultures. Language was born as spoken language and has remained like that. Writing is only the symbolic representation of spoken language, and human beings speak more than they write. Many languages have never achieved a written representation.

There is a large interaction between language and culture. This inter-

action is always there. To try to eliminate it is to try to stop communication. Communication is the sharing of human experience through language. Culture is an intrinsic part of communication, and vice versa. Cultural patterns, including non-verbal communication as one of the most important, need to be included when teaching communication. Research in this area has shown that more than half of the meaning in communication resides in non-verbal actions, one-third of communication is vocal, and only a small fraction of this meaning resides in the language itself (Hall, 6). Galloway (5) also states that sixty-five percent of all communication is non-verbal, and even if students possess good verbal communication, if they are not aware of the non-verbal aspects of communication, they are unable to communicate effectively in many face-to-face cultural contexts.

Importance of the Study of Culture

One of the most recent reports addressing education (The College Board, 10) speaks about the interaction of language and culture, and about the reasons for studying culture. It states that the knowledge of another language fosters greater awareness of cultural diversity among the peoples of the world because individuals who have foreign language skills can appreciate more readily other people's values and ways of life. It adds that we live in a multicultural nation where many people speak a home language other than English. Some of these people seek to improve their proficiency in that other language and to preserve their cultural heritage. In doing so, they preserve and develop a valuable national resource. The report recommends levels of cultural knowledge for students. When referring to all students who want to enter college, it suggests that students with basic proficiency in a foreign language,

also need some knowledge of the culture, history, and life patterns of the society in which the language is spoken. When referring to students who expect to follow an advanced program of study in another language or in subjects that require foreign language skills, the report recommends that students with this greater proficiency in the language also will need some knowledge of the history, geography, institutions, current political situation, and the intellectual and artistic achievements of the society or societies in which the language is spoken.

Some generalities can be stated about the teaching of culture. Cultural understanding must be promoted in various ways so that students are prepared to understand, accept, and live harmoniously in the target language community (Omaggio, 9). The use of techniques to increase this type of understanding should receive a high priority in proficiency-oriented classroom instruction. Such techniques might include the use of cultural capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators, minidramas, realistic survival situations, and simulations of cultural events. Krashen (7) states that there is a direct relationship between acquisition of a language and attitudinal factors. If the major goal in foreign language teaching is the development of communicative abilities, attitudinal factors and motivational factors are more important that the aptitude toward language learning. Aptitude is closely related to conscious learning which may be achieved through the study of linguistic patterns, but conscious learning makes only a small contribution to communicative ability. The study of culture fosters the attitudinal and motivational factors. Therefore, it is important to teach culture to allow the students to understand the value system and the cultural traits of the speakers of the language and to foster a positive attitude toward these

speakers of the language. Crawford-Lange et al. (4) indicate that the foreign language teachers should set the development of a cultural syllabus as a professional priority. They suggest that culture should assume a prime role in foreign language curricula and that culture should determine the language skills to be developed. They also say that while social studies classes can teach cultural components and language classes could restrict themselves to linguistics components, the picture is whole only when language and culture come together. This merging cannot take place in the social studies courses. It can only occur in the foreign language classroom. Finally, cultural authenticity is very important when teaching culture in a foreign language class. Textbook usually omit what the authors do not consider important, or overemphasize what the authors like or dislike about a particular culture. The culture presented in textbooks represents a value judgment made by the authors. This has led to many stereotypes of foreign peoples and cultures (ACTFL, 1).

Culture: What Kind?

Having established the relationship between language and culture and the importance of teaching culture in the ESL and foreign language classrooms, we can now enter into the substance of this paper; namely, the teaching of culture in the ESL and foreign language classrooms. To define and decide what kind of culture should be taught in the classroom, it is necessary to observe that classroom within the cultural environment of the community. The foreign language classrooms, except in cosmopolitan metropolitan areas, usually is a cultural island by itself. The only aspects of the foreign culture to which the students are exposed are those dealt with in the classroom. There is not outside contact with the foreign culture. The facts and traits of that foreign culture have to be presented before any attempt to explain

these facts or cultural traits is made. On the other hand, the ESL classroom is located within the American culture. The students are exposed to this culture most of the time. The facts and traits of the American culture are observed by the students daily. Therefore, instruction can be concentrated on explaining these facts and traits, which are usually learned by outside contact.

The goals of the foreign language class cannot usually go beyond an awareness and understanding of the foreign culture. The teaching usually covers generalities about this culture without an in-depth look into it. To the contrary, the teaching of culture in the ESL class works toward the immediate integration of the students into the American culture. All aspects of this surrounding culture must be explained in the classroom because the students need to adapt themselves to and integrate into the culture as quickly as possible.

To teach about culture it is necessary to identify which aspects of the culture should be taught, and also in what sequence. Multicultural patterns are not usually taught in the foreign language classroom. No matter what kind of multicultural population exists in Paris, the French teachers usually present French culture as a monolithic block. When the culture of the different people who speak French is to be introduced, the curriculum usually makes reference to the different nationalities where French is spoken. The same can be stated about any other foreign language instructional pattern. In the ESL classes different patterns of instruction can be observed depending upon the communities where the classes are taught: multicultural patterns may be observed in cosmopolitan areas, while general or local community patterns are observed elsewhere.

In conclusion, the main differences between the teaching of culture in the foreign language and ESL classes seem to appear in three areas. These are: 1) the level of detail in the explanation of cultural traits, 2) the level of awareness or integration into the culture, and 3) the level of insight into local community cultural patterns.

Sequencing the Teaching of Culture

Having shown the kind of culture that is taught in the ESL and foreign language classrooms, it is necessary now to state what should be taught at each level of instruction. The State of Florida Department of Education has developed curriculum frameworks for foreign language and ESL courses. These frameworks will be used as a guide for sequencing the teaching of culture. It will be done under the assumption that the general goal for the teaching of culture in foreign languages is an appreciation and understanding of the historical and cultural values of the people who speak the target language, including comparing and contrasting of the foreign culture with that of the United States. It will also be assumed that the general goal for the teaching of culture in the ESL class is a prompt integration of the students into the North American culture.

In level one of foreign languages, the students should be aware of basic aspects of the foreign culture including, but not limited to, holidays, customs, common foods, leisure activities, and selected artistic forms (music, dance and graphic arts). They should also be able to compare and constrast aspects of the culture of the speakers of the foreign language with the culture of the United states, including common non-verbal responses.

Starting with level two the students should be able to demonstrate

limited social competence in the foreign culture by showing comprehension of common rules of etiquette, customs and sensitivities, and a knowledge of contributions to the arts and humanities by speakers of the target language. They should also possess a knowledge of aspects of the foreign culture pertaining to historical highlights, leisure-time activities, festivals, and traditions.

In level three the students should be able to possess a knowledge of the similarities and differences between the United States culture and the culture of speakers of the target language. They should also be able to read and comprehend edited literary materials produced by writers representative of the foreign culture; and read simple authentic materials within a familiar context which should include, but not be limited to, prose on familiar subjects containing description and narration, news items, simple biographical information, social notices, and simple business letters.

Continuing with level four the students should be able to read and comprehend short stories and other authentic foreign writings with the use of a dictionary, and be aware of well known characters and themes in a variety of literary genres. They also should discuss, in the foreign language, historical and cultural facts dealing with speakers of the foreign language, which should include, but not be limited to, historic and literary heroes, socio-political issues, geography, and natural resources.

In level five the students should demonstrate a level of cultural understanding that allows them to perform appropriately in a foreign country environment. They should also be familiar with foreign literature and the artistic and historical aspects of the culture of speakers of the target language, and discuss how these aspects interrelate.

Finally, in level six and beyond, the students should be able to read with understanding most literary genres in the original, including the identification of comedy, tragedy, satire, romance, and irony in specific foreign language works. They should also be able to use the written language effectively in most formal and informal exchanges in a variety of topics. To conclude, they should also be able to describe and compare issues dealing with the foreign culture and the United States culture, including literature, history, art, customs, behavioral patterns, and current events.

The above described cultural component of the curriculum frameworks proceeds from the simple to the complex, from oral to reading and writing skills, and it includes many aspects of the culture of speakers of foreign languages. A word of caution should be given to teachers in Florida. There are many Cuban-American students who are taking "Spanish for Spanish-Speakers." These students are concentrated in the southeastern part of the state. This paper deals with the teaching of culture to non-native speakers of foreign languages. The recommendations included in the sequence of cultural teaching do not apply to students who are taking "Spanish for Spanish-Speakers." These students, in addition to arriving at the classroom with language skills, also arrive knowing their own Cuban-American culture. The teaching of Spanish culture to these students should be done in a different way. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow dealing with this issue.

The curriculum frameworks for ESL courses deal with the teaching of culture in a less in-depth fashion. This is done under the assumption that the teaching of culture in ESL classes must be embedded in all aspects of instruction because the North American culture constitutes an intrinsic part

of the ESL environment inside and outside the classroom.

In level one the students should identify distinctive aspects of American culture as expressed in literature and language. These aspects include: 1) the identification of people, places, and things found in the community, as well as the identification of major holidays and celebrations; 2) the distinction of appropriate topics of humor in American culture; and 3) the identification of patriotic or folklore characters or symbols as illustrated through American literature.

The focus of level two is more pragmatic. It deals with the idea of business in the American culture. The students are taught how to use proper form when writing a business letter and addressing business envelopes, and how to write letters of request, adjustment, complaint, application, or opinion which contain necessary and accurate information. Finally, in level three the students deal with North American culture as expressed in literature.

A comparison of the teaching of culture as stated in the foreign language and ESL curriculum frameworks shows that the differences expressed in the previous section of this paper are included in both curriculum frameworks. In foreign languages, the teaching of cultural facts and traits is more detailed, and although the explanations of these facts and traits are included, they deal mainly with the comparison and contrast of the foreign culture with that of the United States. In the ESL curriculum, it is assumed that the explanation of cultural facts and traits is an intrinsic part of the whole curriculum. Integration into the foreign culture is achieved in foreign languages toward the end of level five, while in ESL this integration should be a goal from the very beginning. Finally, in foreign languages there is a global approach to the foreign culture, while in ESL the local community is the focus

from the beginning of level one.

Some implications can be drawn from what has been stated so far about the teaching of culture in the ESL and foreign language classes. First, sociolinguistics is a field of study that should be of interest to all ESL and foreign language teachers. Not only the linguistics aspects of language are necessary for communication, but the cultural aspects are very important too. The attitude of the students toward the people who speak the language is more important for the acquisition of the language than linguistic aptitude. Second, the teaching of culture in the foreign language or ESL class merely as a supplemental activity is essentially wrong, because of the necessary interaction between language and culture at all times. Third, foreign language teachers need supplementary materials to overcome shortages in teaching cultural authenticity. By using culturally authentic materials the elimination of cultural stereotypes can be achieved. These materials can be obtained from the daily press, television, radio, and interviews with members of the cultural group under study. Obviously, these shortages in teaching cultural authenticity are not present in ESL. Finally, teachers must always keep in mind the importance of culture in ESL and foreign language classrooms.

Recommendations for the Teaching of Culture

Based on the above implications, the following recommendations are made to teachers for the teaching of culture in the ESL and foreign language classes. These recommendations follow those made by Brooks (3):

1. Supplement the textbook with authentic materials taken from the newspapers, magazines, and other mass media.
2. Try to bring visitors to the classes to talk about their cultures.

3. Find additional information about the culture by visiting countries where the foreign language is spoken. For ESL teachers these visits should include cities and regions throughout the United States.

4. Make clear to the students, at the beginning of the school year, that culture is a main objective of the course.

5. Begin the teaching of culture very early in the course and relate culture to the linguistic issues being treated.

6. Use both English and/or the foreign language for the teaching of culture, depending upon the situation and the students' linguistic levels and experiences.

7. Assign materials from magazines and newspapers to be read as homework, and also assign listening to the radio and watching television programs, when they are available.

8. Use as many audio-visual aids (posters, records, tapes and cassettes, slides, filmstrips, films, and videotapes) as you can find about the culture in consideration.

9. Decorate your classrooms with posters, artifacts, and other regalia representative of the culture.

10. Do not generalize very much about the culture, but rather present evidences and let your students arrive at their own conclusions.

11. Compare and contrast the foreign culture with that of the United States to foster positive attitudes as the students learn to understand and accept the differences between both cultures.

Teacher Competencies

Thonis (11) provides us with an idea of the teaching competencies necessary for ESL and foreign language teachers. Seven of the nine competencies that this author considers necessary for reading teachers who teach Hispanic students may be considered essential for the ESL and foreign language teachers. Beyond the general and professional education requirements for teaching, ESL and foreign language teachers should have the opportunity during their preservice years to acquire knowledge of linguistics and com-

parative analysis through the learning of the target language, for the foreign language teachers and through linguistic studies for the ESL teacher. More specifically, these language competencies are listed by Thonis as follows:

1. Acquisition of the two languages (English and the foreign language) leading to proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, writing, and culture. (This competency is not absolutely necessary for ESL teachers, but is recommendable).
2. Awareness of the most commonly recognized differences in dialects.
3. Background information from linguistics, including contrastive analysis.
4. Knowledge of the cultural differences and similarities between both communities.
5. Recognition of the impact that cultural variables have on learning.
6. Identification of significant historical and cultural contributions of the foreign culture.
7. Knowledge of learning theory, including transfer principles and motivation.

Two other competencies are listed by Thonis, which are specific for reading teachers. If we use the words "foreign languages" instead of the word "reading," we can complete the competencies required for the ESL and foreign language teachers to be able to teach language and culture in their classes. These two competencies are specifically necessary for the ESL teachers as stated for reading. These two last competencies are:

8. Understanding of the varied methods and techniques for teaching reading (foreign languages) as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each.
9. Recognition of the logical scope and sequence of reading (foreign language) skills.

Teacher Training

The teacher training programs at colleges and universities have the

duty of imparting the knowledge and skills necessary for the above stated competencies to prospective teachers during their preservice years. Inservice education can also impart that knowledge and those skills. There are also other sources that can be used for this purpose. Among these sources the professional literature about the subject can be cited as most important. There are many articles, materials and resources that teachers can use to increase their knowledge and skills in teaching culture. These can be found through research at professional libraries.

Summary

A study of the interaction between language and culture was made to arrive at the conclusion that the study of the culture of the people who speak the target language is a very important part of the ESL and the foreign language classes. Recent curriculum frameworks developed by the Florida Department of Education were used to provide a suggested sequence to the teaching of culture and to show the difference between that teaching in the ESL and the foreign language classes. Some general recommendations for the teaching of culture were made that led to the listing of teacher competencies necessary to follow these recommendations. Finally, suggestions and recommendations were made about how to acquire these competencies, placing special emphasis on the professional readings that can assist teachers in their own inservice education.

References

1. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Curriculum, Competence and the Foreign Language Teacher, Theodore V. Higgs, ed. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1982.

2. Benedict, Ruth. Patterns of Culture. New York: New American Library (Mentor), 1946.

3. Brooks, Nelson. "An Introduction to Culture for Teachers of Foreign Languages," in Teacher's Notebook in Foreign Languages. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

4. Crawford-Lange, Linda M. and Lange, Dale L. "Doing the Unthinkable in the Second-Language Classroom: A Process for the Integration of Language and Culture," in Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizin Principle, Theodore V. Higgs, ed. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1984.

5. Galloway, Vicky B. "Perceptions of the Communicative Efforts of American Students of Spanish." Modern Language Journal, Vol. 64 (1980) pp. 428-33.

6. Hall, Edward T. The Silent Language. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications Inc., 1959.

7. Krashen, Stephen. Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. New York: Pergamon Press, 1981.

8. Laird, Charlton. The Miracle of Language. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc. 1953.

9. Ommaggio, Alice C. "The Proficiency-Oriented Classroom," in Teaching for Proficiency, the Organizing Principle, Theodore V. Higgs, ed. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1984.

10. The College Board. Academic Preparation for College. What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do. New York: The College Board, 1983.

11. Thonis, Eleanor. The English-Spanish Connection. Northvale, New Jersey: Santillana Publishing Co., 1983.